



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

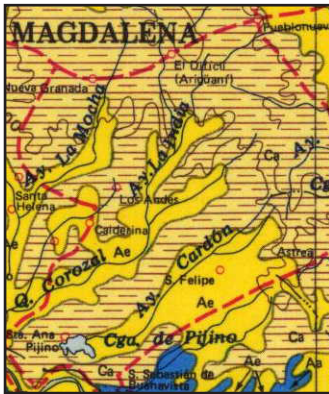
COLOMBIA

SUCCESS STORY

Colombian Women Plant A Better Future

USAID/Colombia Helps Colombian Reforestation Company to Commercialize Eucalyptus After 20 Years of Research

"Now we make a salary whereas before we spent our time at home doing nothing. Now we can provide for our families."
Jeanet Rojas, Program Beneficiary



For generations cattle ranching dominated the economy and cultural life of San Sebastián, in the department of Magdalena. Its largely Afro-Colombian population of 20,000 worked in ranching or related trades. But San Sebastián gradually fell into economic decline. Its residents left in droves, searching for better economic opportunities. In late 2005, the San Sebastián Reforestation Company (RESS), with support from USAID/Colombia, began to expand its eucalyptus nurseries and test plots to generate meaningful opportunities for community residents.

Eucalyptus was initially introduced into Colombia from Australia, based on expectations of short growth cycles and strong market potential. During the past two decades RESS labored to develop a variety of eucalyptus that would be especially well-adapted to the dry tropical regions of northern Colombia. Large-scale tests proved this genetically improved stock would increase yields up to 50 percent. It also proved drought resistant. Lumber from RESS-grown trees has sold well for such uses as building, power poles, fence posts, and flooring.

By early 2005, RESS had 3,000 hectares (7,410 acres) of eucalyptus under cultivation, and projected additional 50,000 hectares (123,500 acres) of to be well-suited for eucalyptus.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
p/stories.usaid.gov

With USAID backing, RESS, under the Programa Forestal de Colombia (Colombia Forestry Program), joined by Maderas y Láminas del Caribe (Maderflex), a local wood processor invited local cattle ranchers to plant eucalyptus on *their* lands. This proved to be an attractive proposition to certain ranchers because the trees only need to be in the ground 18 months before cattle can be turned back into the same fields for grazing.

In December 2005, the first 220 hectare (543 acre) commercial plot was planted on privately-owned ranch land. Ranchers provided the land and prepared it for planting. USAID/Colombia provided funds for the seedling trees, and covered the labor costs of planting. RESS provided technical assistance and plant maintenance for the first six months. Maderflex optioned the first right-of-refusal to buy the wood when it is ready for harvest.

"The USAID Forestry Development Program opened the doors for us," says Sindulfo Salazar, one of the forestry technicians who has worked for the Reforestation Company for more than twenty years. "Before, this was a pilot program confined to our farm. Now we are extending our eucalyptus plantings to other land."

The immediate economic benefit to residents of San Sebastián was the hiring of approximately 250 workers to transplant eucalyptus seedlings into the new plot. This provided desperately needed employment for female heads-of-household, among the biggest beneficiaries of the project. Melba Chavez, a single mother employed at the RESS greenhouse, commented, "This is like a little dance we do here. With one hand I hold the seedlings and with the other I cut the roots and then put the seedling neatly in this basket." While preparing a seedling for planting, Jeanet Rojas affirms; "Now we make a salary whereas before we spent our time at home doing nothing. Now we can provide for our families."



Beneficiary Jeanet Rojas Prepares Eucalyptus Seedlings for Transplantation

Photo: Programa Forestal de Colombia